

The Holocaust: A New History

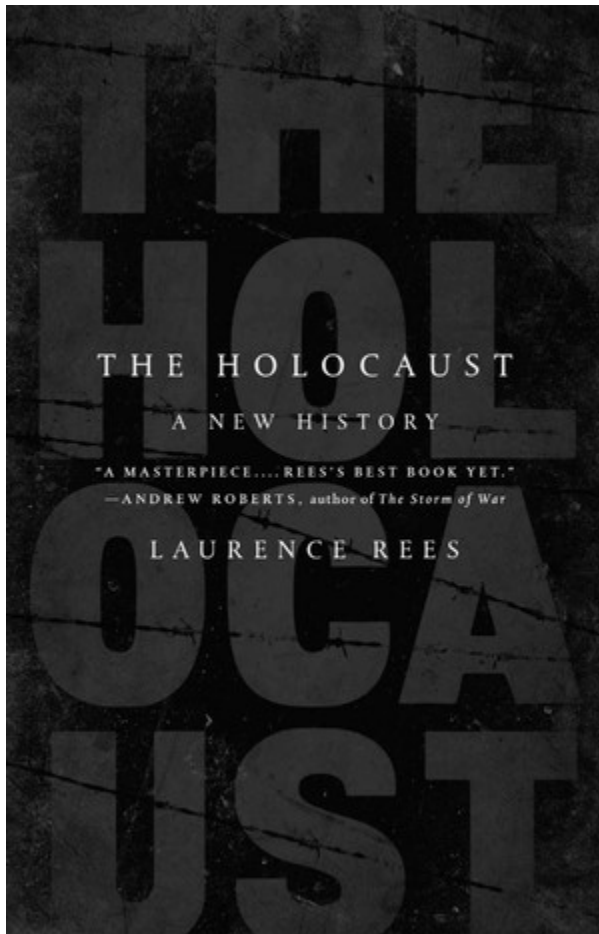
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Abstract

British historian Laurence Rees, the former Creative Director of History Programmes for the BBC, has written a new "magnum opus": *The Holocaust: A New History*. This review lays bare a few of the shortcomings of this old wine in new wineskins.

Greetings dear readers, we're back again with another episode of our loveable historian and award winner Laurence Rees. (For the first episode [see here](#)). This time we are going to have a look at his newest addition in the Holocaust arsenal – his magnum opus *The Holocaust: A New History* (Penguin Books, 2017). So fasten your seat belts because the ride is about to begin!

First Impression



The book itself is not impressive. Rather small in size (20x13 cm), 509 pages, simple cover design, low-quality paper. Not exactly what you would expect from an opus magnum. But perhaps there is more inside. Here are the contents:

1. Origins of Hate

2. Birth of the Nazis (1919-1923)
3. From Revolution to Ballot Box (1924-1933)
4. Consolidating Power (1933-1934)
5. The Nuremberg Laws (1934-1935)
6. Education and Empire-Building (1935-1938)
7. Radicalization (1938-1939)
8. The Start of Racial War (1939-1940)
9. Persecution in the West (1940-1941)
10. War of Extermination (1941)
11. The Road to Wannsee (1941-1942)
12. Search and Kill (1942)
13. Nazi Death Camps in Poland (1942)
14. Killing and Persuading Others to Help (1942-1943)
15. Oppression and Revolt (1943)
16. Auschwitz (1943-1944)
17. Hungarian Catastrophe (1944)
18. Murder to the End (1944-1945)

Rees starts with early anti-Semitism in Germany, Hitler's rise to power, the Nuremberg Laws, the first concentration camps, and the deportations. These are not in dispute, so we can skip them. What we want to know is what Rees has to say about the extermination claims. Most importantly, is there anything really new?

Give Me an Order

As there is no written order for the Holocaust, historians have been struggling for years to find a way around this. Rees concludes with the following:

"From quite early in my interaction with this history I had seen how some people had decided that, because the crime of the extermination of the Jews was so horrendous, it must have been orchestrated and planned at one monumental moment. But it seemed to me that this was a mistaken leap. As I hope this book demonstrates, the journey to the Holocaust was a gradual one, full of twists and turns, until it found final expression in the Nazi killing factories." (p. 429)

So let's examine some specific points about this. Regarding Hitler's Prophecy, a speech he gave on 30 September 1939 (where he stated that if the Jewish financiers plunge mankind into another world war, the result will be the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe), Rees comments as follows:

“What exactly did Hitler mean by this? A serious threat against the Jews, certainly. But did he explicitly mean that he intended to kill the Jews in the event of a world war? That is debatable, especially since there is no evidence that he had a detailed plan of destruction in mind for the Jews as he uttered these words. An alternative, more persuasive interpretation is that by ‘annihilation’ Hitler meant ‘elimination’, and thus one possible ‘solution’ to the Nazis’ Jewish ‘problem’ remained the destruction of the Jews in Europe by forcibly removing them from the continent.” (p. 147)

Rees backs this up with other Hitler statements, thus poking another hole in the Holocaust storyline. Harsh words like these appear all the time as proof, but clearly they are not enough anymore. But Rees still has to explain the absence of a written order. He tries with the following trick:

“Much better, from Hitler’s perspective, to make sure that no order in his name about this sensitive project ever existed. He was well aware that written orders could come back and haunt the sender. That is one reason he remarked in October 1941: it’s much better to meet than to write, at least when some matter of capital importance is at issue.” (p. 230)

That statement is from *Hitler’s Table Talk* (2000, p. 56). But if someone checks the source, he will realize that Hitler did not talk about orders at all, but how he... managed his mail! Here is the full passage:

“I dictate my mail, then I spend a dozen hours without bothering about it. Next day I make a first set of corrections, and perhaps a second set the day after. In doing so, I’m being very prudent. Nobody can use a letter in my own hand against me. Besides, it’s my opinion that, in an age when we have facilities like the train, the motor-car and the aircraft, it’s much better to meet than to write, at least when some matter of capital importance is at issue.”

Ohhh Rees, that trickster. And it doesn’t end here. It has just begun. A few pages later we arrive at this:

“But does all this mean that Hitler made a decision in autumn 1941 to exterminate the Jews? Is this when the Holocaust as we know it began? A number of new initiatives certainly came together at this time, including not only the decision to deport Jews from the Old Reich and Protectorate to the east, and the construction of killing installations at Chelmno and Belzec in Poland, but also Hitler’s own comments in private that October about the Jews. Ominously, he quoted from the ‘extermination’ speech he had given in January 1939. ‘From the rostrum of the Reichstag’, he said on 25 October 1941, ‘I prophesied to Jewry that, in the event of war’s proving inevitable, the Jew would disappear from Europe. That race of criminals has on its conscience the two million dead of the First World War, and now already hundreds of thousands more... It’s not a bad idea, by the way, that public rumour attributes to us a plan to exterminate the Jews.’” (p. 237)

This is the quote from *Hitler’s Table Talk* (p. 87) that Rees had previously falsified in his book on Auschwitz. This time he quotes it correctly but as can be seen he omits something. He also quotes it in a previous chapter with the same omission (p. 32). The unsuspected reader will not notice this, and it’s actually the most important part:

“Let nobody tell me that all the same we can’t park them in the marshy parts of Russia!”

As this sentence did not fit with the extermination claim, it had to go. In the same book we also find Hitler’s statement on the Jews one week after the Wannsee Conference:

“The Jews must pack up, disappear from Europe. Let them go to Russia. Where the Jews are concerned, I’m devoid of all sense of pity.” (p. 260)

This is the first tactic of the official historians: Suppress the evidence when possible. The other? What else? The “code language”:

“On 19 July 1942, on a visit to Poland, Himmler ordered that the ‘resettlement of the entire Jewish Population of the General Government’ should be ‘carried out and completed by 31 December 1942.’ According to Himmler, a ‘comprehensive clearing out’ was necessary. This was a euphemistic way of saying that he wanted virtually all of these Jews to be murdered by the end of the year.” (p. 295)

No historian ever bothers to explain this simple contradiction (they just hope you won’t notice). What’s the point for the Germans to hide their words but not their actions? Rees himself admits:

“The Nazis did not hide the concentration camps. Their existence was well known and newspapers across the world carried stories about them.” (p. 73)

And if we suppose that nobody paid attention:

“The dead bodies were burnt in ditches and the smoke that filled the sky was noticeable for miles around.” (p. 305)

Simple facts like these are enough to throw any claims about a code language in the garbage.

The Death Camps

A quick note on the death camps. Chelmno, Belzec and Sobibor are briefly discussed in Chapter 11 (2 or 3 pages each). Chapter 13 is about the death camps in Poland, but it mostly focuses on Treblinka and Majdanek. Auschwitz gets the largest share of the pie, with the events concerning it spreading from Chapter 11 to Chapter 17. But Rees offers nothing new at all. He simply repeats what can be found in all other books.

The Photos

There are 49 photos in the book. They are as follows:

- 27 photos of Hitler, Nazis or other Germans.
- 6 photos of camp prisoners or deportees.
- 4 photos of Jews in ghettos or elsewhere.
- 1 photo of a smashed shop after Kristallnacht.
- 1 photo of a burning synagogue.
- 1 photo of a Jewish ID.
- 1 photo of Chaim Rumkowski (ghetto leader).
- 1 photo of Pope Pius XII.
- 1 photo of a shooting at the eastern front.

- 1 photo of captured Soviet soldiers.
- 1 photo of Auschwitz (main gate).
- 3 photos of Birkenau (one air photo and two of the crematories).
- 1 photo of Bergen Belsen (a ditch with corpses).

For the most-documented event in human history we might expect something more. But still, that's better than nothing, right?

Witness Please!

The witnesses are of course indispensable in the official story. So how does Rees make use of them? This is quite interesting. First, he quotes a few known witnesses like Rudolf Reder, Samuel Willenberg and Jan Karski. But other major witnesses are totally absent. Names like Kurt Gerstein, Henryk Tauber, David Olère and Elie Wiesel are nowhere to be found. And even the rest that manage to have their 15 seconds of fame do not fare much better.

Rudolf Höss appears on several pages, but when it comes to gas chambers (details, construction, executions), his testimony is simply non-existent. Miklos Nyiszli, another top witness, appears three times. But what did Rees consider worthy of mentioning? A dinner (p. 326), a football game (p. 328) and an experiment of Mengele (p. 359). You read that right. Next witness, Yankel Wiernik: only one quote (p. 345), and that regarding the escape from the camp. So on to Rudolf Vrba, where we find this:

“But the Vrba-Wetzler report left no room for doubt about the real purpose of Auschwitz. It accurately described the opening of the new crematoria/gas chamber complexes at Birkenau in 1943 and the way in which the murders were conducted. It wasn't surprising that the report was so authentic, because one of the Sondercommandos working in the crematoria, Filip Muller, had told the two Slovaks exactly what went on there.” (p. 400)

Nothing could be further from the truth, as that report is full of errors and a completely made-up plan of the crematories. Of course, the history-award winner Rees can't let you know that. As for Müller (Hilberg's star witness who among other things saw buckets jumping around because of still-living pieces of flesh inside), he appears one more time with an unimportant sentence (p. 406) before he vanishes into oblivion. That's all folks.

So what's new? A few unpublished testimonies here and there. These are basically the reason Rees chose the title *A New History*. But there is really no new information obtained from them. They're just same old, same old.

Hitler's Testament

One final note. Rees writes about Hitler's political testament:

“He also hinted that he was responsible for – indeed proud of – the extermination of the Jews. He said that he had 'never left any doubt' that the 'actual guilty party' for starting the war would be 'held responsible'. This was, according to him, 'the Jews'. 'Further,' he said, 'I have not left anybody in the dark about the fact that this time, millions of adult men would not die, and hundreds of thousands of women and children would not be burnt or bombed to death in the cities, without the actual culprit, albeit by

more humane means, having to pay for his guilt.’ [...] Hitler was not sorry for the destruction he had brought into the world. Far from it. [...] He was pleased, even as Germany came crashing down about him, that he had brought about the death of 6 million Jews.” (p. 421)

Needless to say, Rees misquotes again. Here is the actual passage (3569-PS):

“I also made it quite plain that, if the nations of Europe are again to be regarded as mere shares to be bought and sold by these international conspirators in money and finance, then that race, Jewry, which is the real criminal of this murderous struggle, will be saddled with the responsibility. I further left no one in doubt that this time not only would millions of children of Europe’s Aryan peoples die of hunger, not only would millions of grown men suffer death, and not only hundreds of thousands of women and children be burnt and bombed to death in the towns, without the real criminal having to atone for this guilt, even if by more humane means.”

Spot the difference.

Summary

For anyone ignorant of the official storyline, this book is a good place to start. Cheap, not very long, and easy to read. For anyone already familiar with it, it would seem that historians have reached a dead end. They cannot move even one step further beyond Hilberg and Pressac. So, a good Holocaust book. But as a history book, I would say that the author’s initials may have something to suggest:

L. R. = LiaR

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